

February 21, 2021 – Lent 1

Welcome and Announcements

Good morning and welcome to worship with McClure United Church this morning. Today we enter the season of Lent...

(Jordan will be preaching)

And it is out of our desire to share God's love... for everyone, that we remember at the beginning of each service our commitment as an Affirming Ministry of The United Church to do our very best to not only welcome but also to celebrate the beautiful diversity of God's people. No matter your age, class, ability, race, gender, gender identity and sexual orientation we are grateful you have joined us for worship today.

And we are worshipping here in Saskatoon on Treaty 6 territory and homeland of the Metis Nation and we take a moment to acknowledge and pay our respect to the ancestors and keepers of the land.

I have a few announcements to share with you today and I'd just like to note that all of the information I'll share with you now can be found in the weekly email, on the website and the facebook page – so go there if you need contact info or more information on how to register and attend.

- Lenten book study Thursdays at 7pm.
- Weekly Bible Study Wed at 1pm.
- Plant a Heart for Refugees... one more week.
- Friday morning connection at 10am

And now, let's breathe deeply of God's love and prepare our hearts for this time of worship...

Sung Opening "Simply to Be" by Ron Klusmeier verse 1 *(Elin Sletmoen)*

Opening Prayer

God hovered over the void and breathed life into dust.

God created in the wilderness.

The Israelites wandered in the desert for forty years.

They found God in the wilderness.

Jesus said "no" to the tempter time and time again.

And claimed his identity in the wilderness.

We grow in the wilderness. We learn in the wilderness.

God is with us—before, through, and after the wilderness.

And we light this candle as a reminder of this.

And wilderness will be our theme throughout Lent this year, as Lent does begin in the wilderness. The Spirit guides Jesus into the wilderness where he comes face to face with temptation and struggle. Yet, in his forty days of fasting, resisting, and wandering, Jesus is shaped and formed for his ministry. Similarly, through the wilderness of Lent, we are invited to surrender to the wild leadings of the Spirit. We rarely enter the wilderness willingly, but hopefully through our wandering we remember who we are and whose we are.

As you can see the candle is surrounded by elements of the wilderness. Instead of running away from the wilderness, we have brought the wilderness in—to face it, confront it, and find our way through it. These elements remind us of the many layers of the wilderness—in these layers we find meaning and the courage to carry on.

Sand accumulates slowly over time, wearing away from rock and stone, crystallizing tiny organisms and minerals into hard matter. In the deep crust of the earth, grains of sand compress into stone. Sand reminds us that the wilderness has history, for as long as there has been creation, there has been wilderness. Friends, the wilderness is somewhere we've been before.

In the winter, many trees let go of their leaves. Some trees need to be pruned in order to bear fruit. Trees remind us that we have to let go in order to start anew. And every spring, trees show us what it looks like to become new. In the wilderness, God is cheering for you. Friends, the wilderness is a place to begin again.

In the bible, the wilderness was often like a maze for the lost. Jacob wrestled with a mysterious angel through the night in the wilderness. The Israelites escaped to the desert and then wandered there for forty years. Jesus encountered the Samaritan woman alone by a well in the midday heat. But often, the wilderness was also a place to encounter the divine. When Jacob dreamt of a ladder leading to heaven, he placed a stone to mark the spot. He called the holy place “Beth-el”—God’s house. Even when we are lost or walking in the dark, stones remind us that God is transforming our terrain into holy ground.

Moss has no roots and requires no soil. Instead, it grows on the face of stone. Moss is known for its hardiness—it can sustain drought, too much rain, and cold temperatures. Some mosses can grow again after being frozen for over a thousand years. Moss reminds us that the wilderness is a place of new life, of resilient life.

Friends, we learn who we are in the wilderness. We learn who God is in the wilderness. We learn how to take the next step, how to find comfort with the unknown, and how to trust God’s call in the wilderness.

In the wilderness our faith is born, nurtured, challenged, and resurrected. Let us journey together, trusting that God is with us every step of the way.

Let us pray...

God of Creation,

The psalms remind us that even before a word is on our tongue, you know it completely. You know the prayers we bring before you today... prayers to ground our minds in your wisdom, open our hearts to your love and centre our bodies in this time of worship.

And you know too the prayers we offer, seeking freedom from all that might keep us from you—confessions of greed and doubt, fear and anxiety, conflict and regret. Free us from these sins.

Give us the strength to say “no” to anything that separates us from you, and “yes” to the things that let love grow. Guide us out of our self-created wilderness spaces and into your light. Gratefully we pray, amen.

Hymn “Flowers Will Bloom in the Desert” *(Jim Gillis)*

Scripture: Matthew 4:1-22 *(read by Meghan Drabble)*

4 Then the Spirit led Jesus up into the wilderness so that the devil might tempt him. ² After Jesus had fasted for forty days and forty nights, he was starving. ³ The tempter came to him and said, “Since you are God’s Son, command these stones to become bread.”

⁴ Jesus replied, “It’s written, *People won’t live only by bread, but by every word spoken by God.*”^[a]

⁵ After that the devil brought him into the holy city and stood him at the highest point of the temple. He said to him, ⁶ “Since you are God’s Son, throw yourself down; for it is written, *I will command my angels concerning you, and they will take you up in their hands so that you won’t hit your foot on a stone.*”^[b]

⁷ Jesus replied, “Again it’s written, *Don’t test the Lord your God.*”^[c]

⁸ Then the devil brought him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. ⁹ He said, “I’ll give you all these if you bow down and worship me.”

¹⁰ Jesus responded, “Go away, Satan, because it’s written, *You will worship the Lord your God and serve only him.*”^[d] ¹¹ The devil left him, and angels came and took care of him.

Reflection *offered by Rev. Jordan Cantwell of St. Martin’s UC*

Hymn “My Love Colours Outside the Lines” *(Jim Gillis)*

Prayers

Jesus, you willingly entered the wilderness to face the unknown.
Save us from complacency and the temptation to avoid hard truths;
grant us courage to take bold risks for the sake of your kingdom.
(silence)

Jesus, you refused to turn stones into bread.

Save us from using our power to satisfy the demands of selfishness in the face of the greater needs of others.

(silence)

Jesus, you refused to leap from the temple top.

Save us from displaying our skills, however modest, to win instant popularity in the face of nobler calls on our abilities.

(silence)

Jesus, you refused to bend your knee to a false god.

Save us from offering our devotion to cheap or easy religion in the face of the harder path on which you bid us to follow you.

(silence)

Jesus, you showed us the way of faithfulness.

Give us wisdom to discern evil; and in the face of all that is deceptively attractive, help us to choose the will of God.

(silence)

Jesus, you chose a ministry of healing, connection, and restoration.

Open our hearts to all who are sick, suffering, lonely, and grieving.

(silence)

Hear our prayers, O Christ, as we join together in the prayer you taught us:

Sung Blessing “Simply to Be” verse 3 *(Shirley Blackburn)*

Blessing

The God who calls us together
now sends us out into the wilderness.

We are not sent out alone...

we are held in the tender and abundant love of God,
Christ is with us, strengthening us for the times of struggle,
and the Spirit is guiding us every step of the way.

Amen.

Sung Blessing “May God’s Sheltering Wings” *(Sacred Sounds)*